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LEWIS CLEPHANE: A PIONEER WASHINGTON REPUBLICAN.

By WALTER C. CLEPHANE.

(Read before the Society, December 18, 1917.)

I could almost wish that the request to write this sketch had come to some one else; for in the desire to place upon record this outline of the life of my father, I dislike to be in the position of seeming to magnify the importance of any of his achievements. On the other hand, it is with a feeling of pleasurable response to a call for duty that I eagerly welcome the opportunity to chronicle the events, a history of which I feel should be permanently preserved. I shall endeavor to state without bias the facts as I know them.

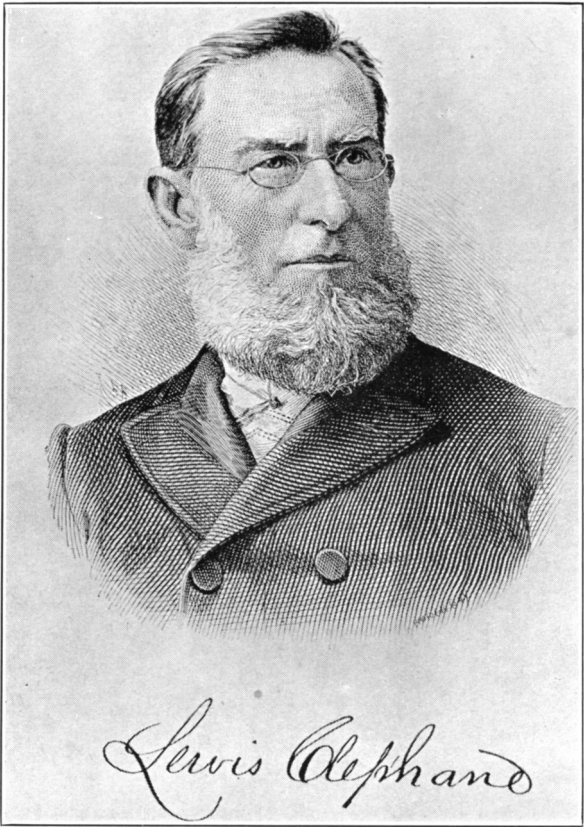
On the 13th day of March, 1824, Lewis Clephane was born in a two story and attic brick house on the south side of G Street northwest, between Twelfth and Thirteenth, on the site now occupied by 1208 G Street. At that time the name Clephane was a familiar one in Washington because the great-uncle of the subject of this sketch, himself named Lewis Clephane, a well-known portrait painter, had for many years lived in the same square and had been the owner of a considerable amount of real estate in this city. To his household there came to reside in the year 1817, just one hundred years ago, my grandfather, James Clephane, a native of Edinburgh, Scotland, who, two years after arriving in Washington, was married by the Rev. Stephen Balch to Miss Ann Ogilvie, by whom he had nine children, of whom my father was the third.

Lewis Clephane may be said to have inherited the

taste for books and newspaper work which so early became the dominant note in his career; for his father, James Clephane, was a printer and was on friendly terms with Sir Walter Scott, who was the guardian of his cousin, Margaret Clephane, who subsequently married Spencer Compton, who was the second Marquis of Northampton. It was during his association with Sir Walter Scott that James Clephane read the proof of much of the manuscript which afterwards was published among the works of that great author. Many of the first editions of these works are in the library left by my grandfather.

My father attended school at the academy of Charles Strahan, then situated at the corner of Ninth and H Streets. His education, so far as attendance upon school was concerned, was completed at the early age of twelve years. At that time, being fired with a desire for business activity, he entered the book store of Kennedy & Elliott, of which in a few years he was given full charge. He later embarked in business on his own account, which he conducted until he was twenty-three years of age, at which time he made a newspaper connection with the *National Era*, an event which became the turning point of his life and offered him ample opportunity for the display of the indomitable courage which was his to a marked degree, and for a literary discernment for which his previous training had fitted him.

He had meanwhile become a member of the Fourth Presbyterian Church, which many of you will remember was in the early days located at Ninth Street on the southern corner of Grant Place, and was presided over by the Rev. John C. Smith, who was in his day one of the pillars of the Presbyterian Church. He taught in the Sabbath School and was a leader in all



the church activities. In fact, to the day of his death he was prominent in religious circles and was when he died a trustee of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, to which his membership was transferred during the later years of his life.

Bereft of his mother at the early age of sixteen years, and with six sisters, all but one younger than himself, and one younger brother James (later well known as the father of the Mergenthaler linotype machine), the responsibilities of life were forced upon his attention. As might be expected, during his boyhood there is nothing to chronicle in the way of achievements except persistent and successful attention to the details of the business with which he was connected, and which fitted him for the tremendous task which he assumed in January, 1847.

At that time the city of Washington was not a particularly attractive field for the dissemination of anti-slavery sentiments. It was, however, the capital of the nation. The Anti-slavery Association of Philadelphia, believing that a newspaper devoted to the cause of abolition of slavery and published at the national capital, might command an influence that a journal of a similar character published elsewhere would fail to create, induced Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, who had previously edited anti-slavery journals, to start in Washington the publication of the *National Era*. Of this periodical Lewis Clephane was, from its commencement until it suspended publication in 1859, its business manager. It will be recalled that this paper ran its career during the time when the question of the tolerance of slavery in the territories of the United States had become acute. The nation was in a high state of tension on this subject. The agitation for the abolition of slavery in the District of

Columbia was at its height. While sentiment in the District appears to have been opposed to the slave trade, it is none the less true that a large amount of the wealth of its citizens was represented in negro slaves. Among the upper classes of Washington society therefore, abolition doctrines were not popular. The new journal was looked upon with suspicion. Its first editorial, in defining its position, pointed out that while it was bitterly opposed to slavery, it did not propose to violate the laws on this subject or to counsel interference with the continuance of the institution where it already existed; but that it was unalterably against the extension of slavery. At no time did it depart from this position.

Among the contributors were John Greenleaf Whittier, William Cullen Bryant, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and others more or less famous.

Mention has been made of the policy of this paper, as announced in its editorial, not to countenance any violation of law, because as this policy was never deviated from, the unreasonable spirit of the famous mob of 1848 is the more apparent.

On April 16, 1848, a schooner in command of Captain Edward Sayres, with whom were Daniel Drayton and others, carried away from Washington surreptitiously seventy-seven slaves with the idea of landing them in free territory whence they could make their escape. The schooner was captured near Point Lookout, and the slaves brought back, together with Drayton and Sayres and their companions. Drayton and Sayres were afterwards convicted and sentenced to a long term of years in the city jail.

The excitement in the city after the negroes were brought back culminated in a mob, which, insisting

that the *Era* had instigated this escape, went to the office of the *National Era* and succeeded in inflicting considerable damage there. Mr. Clephane was in the office at the time and did his best to prevent the demolition of the place, but the credit for its being saved from destruction is due to Captain Goddard, the head of the police force, who stationed himself in the doorway and declared that any man who entered would do so over his dead body. By his resolute action, assisted as he was only by a handful of his force, the place was saved. It should be remembered that at this time there were but fifteen members of the police force in the city altogether and they were on duty only at night.

The aftermath of this story is what particularly concerns this paper. After Drayton and Sayres had been in jail four years, Franklin Pierce, who was then President, at the earnest solicitation of Senator Charles Sumner, pardoned the prisoners. Sumner presented the President's pardon to the jailer and demanded their release, but was told that the Secretary of the Interior had requested that the prisoners be not discharged, inasmuch as he was expecting a requisition for them from the State of Virginia. Sumner, greatly distressed, called at the *Era* office and asked Mr. Clephane what he should do. Being advised to insist upon the release, Sumner again made demand upon the jailer for their freedom in accordance with the President's pardon, and with great reluctance they were then surrendered. By this time the news of the pardon had leaked out, the mob spirit again asserted itself, and search was made for Drayton and Sayres. Although no one connected with the *National Era* had had anything to do with the attempt to liberate the slaves made four years before, now that

the men concerned were legally free, Mr. Clephane felt that there was no reason why he should not do all in his power to save Drayton and Sayres from the unreasoning fury of the mob, and with that idea in view he concealed them in his residence until nightfall. It so happened that heavy rains had continued for a month, causing freshets which had washed out all the bridges between Washington and Baltimore. Mr. Clephane made the round of the livery stables in the effort to find a driver who would undertake the task of transporting these men to Baltimore, but it was not until late that night he found any one who cared to risk his life and property in the attempt. He finally found an Irishman who, for a liberal fee, undertook the commission and about 10:00 o'clock that night Clephane and his companions started out over the Baltimore pike, which was not then in its present magnificent condition. The road was a sea of mud and a mass of gullies. Every rivulet had become a stream. Those who remember the old Bladensburg pike will recall the ford at Bladensburg over the Eastern Branch. That night it was a wide roaring freshet. The horses tried the ford and lost their footing, the driver declined to go further and insisted that he would return to Washington. Mr. Clephane had no weapon with him, but he did have in his pocket the big office key of the *National Era* door. Pulling this out he leveled it against the driver's ear and told him if he did not go on, he would blow his brains out. All metal felt alike to the driver, who could not see how harmless it was. The horses plunged in; Clephane took the whip; the carriage went in to such a depth that the water came over the floor; the fugitives thought the end had come; but the office key and the whip did their work and the Eastern Branch was passed. At every stream a like

difficulty was encountered. In a covered bridge near Elkton they were stopped by a highwayman; but the office key again came into play with the same successful result. At daylight they were on the outskirts of Baltimore. The carriage was dismissed; tickets were purchased on the Northern Central Railway above the city; and the prisoners proceeded on their way to Harrisburg, rejoicing.

My father always felt very happy in the fact that he was instrumental in putting before the world the novel which has since become so famous, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." It was the custom of Dr. Bailey, the editor of the *Era*, to send about Christmas time, to various persons of literary habits, small checks with the suggestion that the recipients write stories for the *Era*. Mrs. Stowe's name was mentioned to the management of the paper by Salmon P. Chase as being a lady in straitened circumstances, who could perhaps contribute something to the columns of that journal. A check was sent to her, with the result that she commenced to write this story, which appeared in serial form in the *National Era*. At first she had no idea of writing a novel of anything like the length in which it finally appeared; but the interest it created was so tremendous that, like Topsy herself, it "grewed." The first number appeared in the issue of June 1, 1851; and the last in the issue of April 1, 1852. I have in my possession a letter written by Mrs. Stowe to my father, dated April 4, 1854, in which she speaks of the success of the publication when issued in book form, as follows:

"The sale thus far has been unprecedented as I am told. 3,000 were sold the first day; ten thousand absorbed in New England, & he has now 3 steam presses working night and day—85 binders constantly at work & is yet behind hand with his

orders. Nothing can be done until this first push is past. I can not even get presentation copies bound to send to England as I desire.

“I am most earnestly desirous that the work should circulate at the south. It was expressly shaped with a view to strengthen the hands of the good and noble minded there who are longing for deliverance from this great evil. I am hoping that many there will read it.”

It was while Lewis Clephane was connected with the *National Era* that he wrote the call for the first convention of the Republican party, he being one of the little group of men who organized it. It was brought about in this way:

On the 19th of June, 1855, he with four others formed a small club known as the Republican Association of Washington, D. C. Its constitution has been fully set forth in the brochure published by my father entitled “The Birth of the Republican Party.” After setting forth the principles of the club, including the opposition to slavery in the territories, Article V is in the following language:

“In order to secure concert of action, and more direct interchange of intelligence and general cooperation throughout the country, we invite the formation of similar associations in every State, County, City or Village, in the Union, whose officers shall be ex officio members of this association, and who are requested to report to this association the names of their officers and number of members, for general information of the whole.”

A significant sidelight upon the times may be gleaned from a memorandum written on the margin of the little book which is before me as I write this, containing the signatures of the members of this organization, as follows:

“In signing this constitution I do hereby promise not to divulge the names of its members.”

Francis P. Blair, Sr., was elected president, but owing to his age he felt unable to serve. In resigning he wrote a letter which was published in all the prominent newspapers of the country and printed in pamphlet form by this association and largely circulated. This letter produced a powerful effect throughout the country. It was followed by the publication and circulation by this local association of an earnest appeal to the friends of the cause throughout the United States to organize clubs animated by similar principles, with the result that such clubs sprang up like magic all over the country. The dissemination of this literature was greatly aided by the *National Era*. At the request of this local association Mr. Clephane prepared in this city the call for the first National Convention of the Republican party. It was signed by the governors of five states dated January 17, 1856, and called for a meeting to be held at Pittsburgh on the 22d of February, 1856. To that Convention my father was the delegate from the District of Columbia.

Francis P. Blair was elected president of the Convention. This Convention appointed an executive committee to call a further Convention for the nomination of candidates for the offices of President and Vice-President of the United States. This executive committee, of which Lewis Clephane was a member, prepared and issued the call for the Convention which was held at Philadelphia on June 17, 1856. Mr. Clephane represented the District of Columbia at the Philadelphia Convention, also at subsequent Conventions. Of course, the first nominee of the new party, Fremont, was defeated, but the foundation was laid for the future success of the party, which four years later nominated Abraham Lincoln for President, and elected him.

At the time of the election of Mr. Lincoln, Lewis Clephane was president of the "Wideawakes," the Republican club of the city, comprising some two hundred members, who had their headquarters called the "Wigwam" at the northwest corner of Second Street and Indiana Avenue in a building which is still standing. On the night when the returns of the election were received, after all the members of the club had left the place with the exception of some five or six, members of a small military organization known as the "National Volunteers" made an attack on the "Wigwam." My father was one of the "Wideawakes" who had remained in the building. As the mob approached the doors were locked. These were quickly broken open by the mob, who rushed in, smashed the printing press and scattered the type in the printing office on the first floor. Meanwhile the little handful of Republicans had ascended with the slightest possible noise to the second floor, where the meeting of the organization had been held. It was not long before the mob followed them and proceeded to destroy the flags, pennants and furniture of the club room. The third floor was the next refuge for the club members, and when the mob approached the third floor, the roof was the only place to which a further retreat could be made. This was promptly occupied. I have often heard my father describe this experience and say that before closing the scuttle each member of the party took a loose brick from the chimney and prepared to give the invaders a warm reception should they advance beyond the third floor. They did not do this, however, but went down stairs and then some one cried: "Fire the building!" The feelings of the captives on the roof can be better imagined than described. The mob did not know they were in

the building at all; nor were these gentlemen anxious to inform them to that effect; but they had no desire to remain and be roasted to death. While debating what was best to be done they were saved by the intervention of Captain Goddard and his little force of men, who scattered the rioters and released the captives.

Mr. Lincoln being elected, it seemed only right that the nation's capital should be the home of a Republican newspaper. The *National Era* had suspended publication about a year previously. Mr. Clephane, in company with William Blanchard, Martin Buell and W. J. Murtagh, and one or two others, therefore founded the *National Republican*, and issued its first number on the 26th of November, 1860. This paper continued in existence without interruption for twenty-eight years. It was first published in the "Wigwam" building on Indiana Avenue above referred to; then at a building at the corner of Seventh and D Streets northwest. It afterwards moved to the west side of Ninth Street below D; then to the northeast corner of Tenth and D. In 1874 the paper moved to the edifice at the southwest corner of Thirteenth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue northwest, which had been erected for it—the same building which was recently demolished to make room for the new office structure on that corner being built by the Southern Railway Company. At that time this building is said to have been larger and more commodious than any newspaper building south of Philadelphia. It was fitted up in an elaborate manner and provided with all the up-to-date appliances used in connection with a newspaper business.

On the occasion when Mr. Lincoln was first inaugurated President it was urged by many that the usual parade be dispensed with on account of the danger incident to such a public demonstration. Great fears

were entertained for the life of the President-elect. General Scott, then in command of the military forces of the United States, was emphatic in his opposition to a public parade, but Mr. Clephane and other members of the inaugural committee, after arguing the subject with him, finally elicited his coöperation, and the parade was held in accordance with custom; but sharpshooters were stationed on the tops of buildings along Pennsylvania Avenue and artillery at the cross streets. The dreaded disaster did not happen.

On the 10th of May, 1861, Mr. Clephane was appointed postmaster of the city, which position he held for nearly two years, when, at the urgent solicitation of Mr. Chase, then Secretary of the Treasury, he resigned to accept the position of collector of internal revenue for this District. The office of postmaster during this period involved the distribution of the mail for the Army, which made the duties of the position extremely arduous. They were well performed.

It was during this period, busy as Mr. Clephane was with the multitudinous duties thrust upon him by reason of the soldiers being added to the patrons of his office, that he married Miss Annie M. Collins, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Simeon Collins, of West Haven, Conn. The ceremony took place at West Haven on the ninth of October, 1862. Mr. Clephane continued after his marriage to reside in his former home next door to the house in which he was born, then numbered 325 G Street northwest, but later numbered 1210. As a result of this union four children were born, all of whom are still living, to wit: Miss Ella C. Clephane, Walter C. Clephane (the writer of this sketch), Lewis P. Clephane, and Alan O. Clephane.¹

¹ Alan O. Clephane, a lawyer of Washington City, who entered the United States Naval Reserve Force at the outbreak of the war with Ger-

After the second nomination of Lincoln as President of the United States, a Lincoln and Johnson Association was formed in Washington of which Mr. Clephane was elected president. He was made chairman of the inaugural committee which managed the ceremonies incident to the second inauguration of Mr. Lincoln.

In 1865 he was elected a member of the Board of Aldermen of the District of Columbia, being the first Republican to become a member of that body. He was a member of the committee of one hundred which advocated a change in the form of government of the District and whose efforts resulted in the passage of the Territorial Act of February 21, 1871.

From January 1, 1869, until August, 1871, he was receiver of the Washington & Alexandria Railroad, which the old residents will recall as at that time running around the Capitol grounds on the west and north.

From December 1, 1873, to August, 1874, he held the position of collector of taxes of the District of Columbia. During this decade he was engaged to a considerable extent in the contracting business.

Mr. Clephane was largely interested in the banking business in this District. Among the financial institutions with which he was connected as a director, may be mentioned the Second National Bank and the National Savings & Trust Company, of which latter he was at one time vice-president. He was a director of the Metropolitan Railroad Company, now absorbed by the Washington Railway & Electric Company; of the Citizens' Fire Insurance Company; of the Washington Brick Machine Company; and the Virginia Brick many, died in that city of pneumonia, January 13, 1918, while still in the Naval Service.

Company. He helped to organize the National Homeopathic Hospital and was for many years the secretary of its board of trustees. His interest in this hospital was very great.

In the year 1877 he completed the erection of his new residence, at the northeast corner of Thirteenth and K Streets northwest, which he continued to occupy up to the time of his death, and where his widow still resides.

No story of Mr. Clephane's life would be complete without mention of the Metropolitan Literary Association, which was organized in 1856, and which contributed in large measure to the cultural enrichment of the citizens of the District over half a century ago. It is interesting to note the names of the men who constituted the members of this Association in 1856-1857, names which are taken from its printed constitution and list of members in the possession of the family. Besides the name of Mr. Clephane, the following, among others, were enrolled: A. R. Shepherd, William G. Moore, Silas Merchant, William C. Murdoch, R. B. Donaldson, C. H. Uttermehle, E. G. Davis, Nathaniel Wilson and John W. Thompson, all of which names are familiar to every Washingtonian and are intimately associated with the growth of the city.

I have made no allusion to my father's private character. A public expression of my own viewpoint would perhaps be out of place. But it would be most unjust to his memory to let this occasion pass without at least indicating something of the gentleness and sweetness of his disposition. He was a man of poise, just in all his dealings with his fellowmen, benevolent in the extreme. Though small of stature and slight of build, he was as courageous as a lion, yielding to no man in matter of principle; yet never self-assertive;

but when his counsel was asked it was freely and wisely given. From an infant I loved him and as I grew to manhood my respect for him constantly increased. He left his children the priceless legacy of a good name, which in the years that have passed since his death I have learned to value far more than I could have valued great riches.

During the later years of his life Mr. Clephane was not actively engaged in business except in so far as he was giving his endeavors for the good of the various business and philanthropic enterprises with which he was affiliated.

In the early part of 1897, still in full vigor of life, at the age of seventy-two years, he was stricken with pneumonia, which resulted in his death on the 12th day of February of that year. His mortal remains now rest in the Glenwood Cemetery, of whose board of trustees he had been for years a devoted member.